

**Dr Sarahleigh Castelyn**

**Why I am not a fan of the Lion King: Ethically-informed Approaches to the Teaching and Learning of South African Dance Forms in Higher Education in the United Kingdom.**

**Introduction**

I teach on a university programme in London that requires students to explore popular and social dance practices. Whenever I introduce myself to students studying on a module that includes South African dance styles as its focus, I start the session by projecting a Peters world map, particularly as there remains heated debate about this map and its attempt to portray 'countries and thereof in more correct size perspective' (Johnson, 2007, p. 60). I point out the routes I have taken that have led me to standing at that moment in front of them as a lecturer. I show how we are here – London – and I am from there – Pietermaritzburg, a small town in South Africa – and I left there to come here – London – and I danced there – Durban, a major port in South Africa – and how now I dance here – London – and how I will be teaching about dance from there – South Africa, a country at the bottom-end of Africa – and they will be learning it here – in Great Britain, an island off the western coast of Europe. The university's dance studios are based in the East End of London that historically has – and is still – a location for immigrant communities. All of this makes the site of the dance studios an evocative location to study popular and social dance and related concerns such as 'cultural appropriation' (Glasser, 1993, p. 183) especially African and African Diasporic dance practices, and their relationship to and with dominant cultures from predominantly North American and Western Europe. Moreover, academic study of dance has over-privileged theatre/art dance, but particularly theatre/art dance from North America and Western Europe:

'[i]n terms of dance practice, it is the serious endeavour of art dance that is awarded high levels of cultural values and, as several dance scholars reflect, the discipline of dance studies has perpetuated the hegemony of the canon' (Dodds, 2011, p. 19).

Dodds' book is on popular dance and aims to 'show how and why popular dance exists within a system of values' (Dodds, 2011, p. 4) and her exploration of the value systems could be adopted and extended to consider all dance forms that have been excluded from the canon, such as the 'wide variety of dance genres and styles' (Friedman, 2009, p. 139) from South Africa. 'South Africa's dancescape has a rich cultural diversity, spanning traditional forms in African ritual dances as well as Western or European dance forms such as ballroom and ballet' (Craighead, 2006, pp. 22-23).

I am committed to opening up the academic study of dance to include all forms and practices and this includes my desire to introduce students in the United Kingdom to a diversity of dances from South Africa, as to understand South African culture, students need to study South African dances from not only the stages, but also dance from the screens, and the streets of South Africa. Dance forms in South Africa are as diverse as

its people are; there are traditional dance practices, such as Ingoma, that draws on Zulu warrior training with its 'high frontal kick' (Meintjies, 2004, p. 174) and is 'a style of competitive display' (Meintjies, 2004, p. 78). There is langarm, an Afrikaans dance style that has its roots in European folk dances, sometimes accompanied by musicians playing guitars and concertinas, or 'mainstream and "golden oldie" songs that [...are...] danced as a two-step or quick-step' (Visser, 2010, p. 180). There are contemporary dance companies such as Flatfoot Dance Company that '[work] from a contemporary based training that includes Graham, Hawkins and Release Technique [...] ballet [...]and] traditional African dance' (Flatfoot Dance Company, 2013). There are popular dances from the streets and social gatherings, for example, isipantsula and kwasa-kwasa with 'Hip Hop workshops [...] offered weekly to large groups of skilled as well as unskilled young people' (Friedman, 2009, p. 138). 'Salsa dance is also popular' (Gibson, 2008, p. 116) and there is 'Cape Jazz Social Dance that 'may have evolved from langarm [...] from swing [...] from jive' (Gibson, 2008, p. 114) or other dance forms or combinations. Smitha Radhakrishan states that Indian, '[c]lassical dance has enjoyed a tremendous resurgence in South Africa in recent years, reflecting a new emphasis on dance as an authentication of Indianness and, generally, a new interest in performing culture' (Radhakrishan, 2005, p. 265). There are many other dance forms too, including Greek dance, Irish dance, Spanish dance; it was in South Africa that Spanish Dance was '[i]n 1965 [...] for the first time ever codified into a teaching method, graded according to age and ability' (Spanish Dance Society, 2007). As I prepare to teach my university class I find myself asking 'whose dance should be taught?' (Friedman, 2009, p. 131). I too understand that these dance forms and styles are often competing for funding, venues, and audiences.

I could follow an investigative path with the students and explore the semantics of the term South African dance, and what is understood by contemporary dance, traditional dance, popular, and social dance in South Africa. In his article 'State of Dance in South Africa' (2011, p. 98), Rob Baum raises a number of questions around this terminology asking,

'[h]ow are we (or who [author's emphasis] are we) to separate South Africa from modern discourses in dance?' and '[c]an a form of dance (such as ballet or contemporary) extant in other parts of the world be considered South African, and what lends the form such regional, national or, for that matter, political categorisation?' (Baum, 2011, p. 98)

Nonetheless, before the students and I can ask these questions, I think it is extremely important that I have a sound ethical base from which to start this discussion with students in the United Kingdom. To teach any dance form in any tertiary institution across the globe, pedagogy must have an ethical foundation. This chapter focuses on how my pedagogical practice is shaped by three ethically-informed approaches I draw on to teach South Africa dance forms in a British University.

## **Hybridity**

The first approach is concerned with looking at the individual and the dance form, and thereby recognising that South Africa is composed of a number of diverse cultures, and a nation of various peoples who dance many dances for a number of reasons. Early on, the students and I discuss what Clive Kellner (1997, p. 29) might be suggesting in his statement 'to be South African is to be hybrid, from which no singular origin is evident'. This hybridity, and I draw on Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) work on hybridity here, resonates and is represented by the students I have in this British institution. Their demographic background ranges from first-generation to umpteenth-generation British born, to coming to study from an Eastern European state, North American exchange students, to those that have experience of growing up in both the United Kingdom and in an African state. The second approach is that to study South African dance, the relationship between the cultural and political landscape and the dance form must be analysed. To understand South African dance, the students have to engage with the social landscape of South Africa. This means that these British students need to understand that the body in South African politics and day-to-day life was - and remains - a site of struggle, the site where the discourses of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and many others have a very real effect on the life of a South African. The majority of the students have a limited understanding of British colonialism and its negative effects. This is primarily due to how the history of the British empire is taught in schools (Owen, 2016). Furthermore, there is tokenistic coverage of the history and culture of Black and Minority Groups in the United Kingdom with Black history relegated to but a month a year. I feel that the students cannot study South African dance without studying the history of colonialism, Apartheid and contemporary Post-Apartheid South Africa. Therefore, it is imperative that I anchor my dance pedagogy in careful contextual study, and this applies to the teaching and study of all dance styles.

What is important to note is that I need to resist a drive to follow 'essentialist notions of culturally responsive pedagogy' and to acknowledge 'that their [student] identities are not solely based on their race or ethnicity. Rather, their identities are complex because of the experiences and relationships they create with others' (Irizarry, 2007, p. 22). Therefore, the first ethical approach of looking at the individual and the dance form is not only focused on a South African individual and the dance form, but what it means to be a student studying South African dance in a British university, and their relationship to other students in the classroom. These ethical approaches that inform my teaching of dance from South Africa are always under review and are not finite or closed, and I am keen to listen to other dance colleagues, and thereby develop my teaching. These three approaches are not static, nor do they operate as individual categories, and perhaps it might be better to think about them as choreographic approaches that I use to shape and direct my pedagogic practice. I strongly believe that to teach dance cultures in universities, there are ethics involved, and these three choreographic strategies are my building blocks, my starting points, for my pedagogy, which must be informed by good ethical practice. Furthermore, these approaches are not simply about ensuring that I have a good sense of integrity, honesty, and ethics that are central to my teaching, but I hope that my conduct is a good model for my students, and in so doing helps them think through their own ethics, and, their personal interaction with dance cultures from outside the United Kingdom. I am committed to educating dance students who critically reflect

on the unequal power relations that unfortunately still exist globally, and how they might *not* add to or perpetuate this inequality any further.

Audiences of South African dance are growing in number, and there is international recognition of South African dance culture practices and a number of South African dance-makers, such as Vincent Mantsoe, Nelisiwe Xaba, and Gregory Maqoma, have performed internationally. Moreover, dance is used as a marketing tool for South Africa, from the adverts aired in the British cinemas promoting holidays in South Africa laden with images of gumboot dancers and Zulu warriors, to the idiski dance of the 2010 Football World Cup. Many dance productions like *Umoja* or *Gumboot* have toured South Africa and across the globe to large audiences. Productions like these draw on dancers with both formal and informal training. Subsequently, my last the third approach, is that there must be close study of South African dance forms and the relationship between the street and the stage. It is integral that my students at the university where I teach, study examples of cultural tourism, and its problems and promises, how South African national identity is constructed through dance performance, and of course, how political and social ideologies are represented and at times questioned through the cultural practice of dance.

Back in the studio, after a discussion of the Peters map, I then project a map of South Africa, and try to make the students aware that there are a majority of people who speak Xhosa here, and Tswana there, and Afrikaans speakers here, and isiZulu there, which is near my birthplace Pietermaritzburg, where there are some people who do not speak isiZulu at all, and that I only speak a little and do they know why that might be? I point out where the Khoesan used to dance...and that dance from the east of South Africa is different to dance from west of South Africa...We then consider the Africanist aesthetic aspects that Brenda Dixon Gottschild proposes in her influential book *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance Dance and Other Contexts* (1998) and is further summarised in her article 'Crossroads, Continuities, and Contradictions: The Afro-Euro-Caribbean Triangle' (2005). Dixon Gottschild's aspects of Africanist aesthetics are helpful if used as a paradigm to introduce dance from Africa, or of the African Diaspora, to students in higher education who are based outside of South Africa, or Africa in general. Nevertheless, these aspects must be unpacked as it is important that students do not presuppose an original and essential African culture.

Like many involved with all aspects of the South African dance industry, and my colleagues working in the theme of dance with links to Africa, I am continuously frustrated by the homogenising of dance from the African continent, in both its form and its content. I am not alone. Dance academic Maxwell Xolani Rani stresses the 'challenge today for people living in South African townships to override western stereotypes of Africa' (Rani, 2012, p. 84). Choreographer Gregory Vuyani Maqoma in 'A Response: Beyond Ethnicity' (Maqoma, 2006, p. 36) states that '[w]e have to override other perceptions and stereotypes set out by the outside world in view of workcoming from the continent'. Later in his article, Maqoma (Maqoma, 2006, p. 37) remarks on how African contemporary dance is also distorted 'on the continent itself'. In 2004, dance critic Adrienne Sichel chaired a panel discussion on 'Defining a

Contemporary African Dance Aesthetic – Can It Be Done?’ at the conference held at the seventh Jomba! Contemporary Dance Experience in Durban, South Africa. On the panel were Gilbert Douglas, Adedayo Liadi, Kettly Noël, Reginald Danster, and Augusto Cuvilas; all key choreographers who work in the idiom of African contemporary dance across the African continent and tour internationally. Sichel opened the session observing that she was ‘pretty sure that every choreographer sitting at this table – at some time or another – has been told that their work is not African or African enough and that’s part of the cultural conundrum that creative and performing artists in Africa face’ (Young-Jahangeer, Loots, Rorvik, Oosthuysen, and Rorvik, 2004: 37).

Sharon Friedman explores this frustration in ‘The Impact of the Tourist Gaze on the Voice of South African Contemporary Dance’ (Friedman, 2012, pp. 89-90) highlighting that this take on dance from Africa is not only a ‘North American or West European perception’ by citing an incident involving the South African choreographer Sifiso Kweyama at a dance event in Angola where he was informed that his ‘piece was not African enough’. Friedman (2012, p. 89) outlines the development of ‘a popular form of “African” dance which was defined by the tourist gaze’ drawing on an interview with Lliane Loots, the Artistic Director of Flatfoot Dance Company in 2010, where Loots refers to this type of African dance as an, ‘...imagined dance [that] makes reference to a cultural tradition that many foreign based audiences believe is authentic and thus will pay to consume it’ (Friedman, 2012, p. 90).

This then poses an important decision for me in my role as a senior dance lecturer in the United Kingdom; what do I include in the curriculum? Do I exclude the productions of *Umoja* and *African Footprint* that take advantage of the tourist gaze and portray an imagined representation of South Africa? Although, these are the shows that tour London dance venues and therefore students will have access to see dance from South Africa live. Besides, these productions do include a variety of South African dance forms that do reflect the diversity of dance practices in South Africa, and they do offer rich material to support class discussions around culture appropriation, performance of nationality, Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’ (1983), and spur an interesting discussion around what these dance productions ‘claim to do’ (Friedman, 2012, p. 98).

In addition to the above, there is the constant conflation of African dance with Black dance. It is important to encourage students to problematise the term ‘African’ and ‘Black’ helping them think through the relationship of their British location to Africa, and the terms ‘European’ and ‘White’, whereby hopefully the invisibility of privilege is exposed. Clare Craighead (2006) troubles the concept of Black Dance in her article ‘“Black Dance”: Navigating the Politics of “Black” in Relation to “the Dance Object” and the Body as Discourse.’ Craighead critiques (2006, p. 28) ‘notions of reductionism and essentialism in order to engage the diversity of work that the label constitutes.’ The constant conflation of ‘African’ dance with ‘Black’ dance reveals a simplistic understanding of the history of the continent of Africa, and ignores the complex, and at times contested, flows of migration of people to and from this geographical area. For example, the people from the Oman who have influenced east African culture in Kenya

and Tanzania, or those with their roots/routes in Indian Indentured labour who have had an effect on South African culture. There are many examples of movement of communities and their effect on culture that I can draw on, and yes, much of this migration is directly related to colonialism with many of its negative and oppressive aspects. This is not to dismiss the very real effect colonialism and Apartheid has had on either South African dance nor dance forms from other parts of Africa and the African Diaspora; rather this is a call to unpack the categories that were instated often by way of colonialism and imperialism, and in South Africa's case Apartheid too. A call to dismantle these terms and expose their foundations that draw on notions of ownership and non-ownership, belonging and not-belonging, hegemony and binary systems of thought. It is necessary to state here, before I continue, that many of these students have their own personal history with aspects of British colonialism. For example, a number of students are first generation British nationals of Nigerian parents. Or, they might be students who are third generation British nationals who have great-grandparents from Jamaica who came to the United Kingdom, for instance, on the ship *The Empire Windrush* in 1948. Or, they might have great great grandparents who fought in the South African War (1899 – 1902). Or, there might be students who have no known direct links to Africa, nevertheless they are studying dance in a city that is built on the profits of trade, and often-imperialist trade with Africa. Akin to the traces of the British in Africa, there are very real instances of Africa in Britain, both historically and contemporary.

Returning to the terms of African dance and Black dance, Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre's Artistic Director, Jay Pather (2006, p. 14), in his address at the Conference convened at the Seventh Jomba! Contemporary Dance Experience calls for ownership of what he calls a 'response-aesthetic, [and] this self consciousness may force us to unpack received notions.' Consequently, it is important to encourage students to problematise the term African and black, helping them think through the relationship of their British location to Africa, and the terms European and white, whereby hopefully the invisibility of privilege is exposed. Clare Craighead (2006) troubles the concept of Black Dance in her article "'Black Dance": Navigating the Politics of "Black" in Relation to "the Dance Object" and the Body as Discourse.' Craighead critiques (2006, p. 28) 'notions of reductionism and essentialism in order to engage the diversity of work that the label constitutes.' I adopt a similar position in my teaching and I begin to disrupt the term South African dance by showing the students a variety of images and clips off the Internet of as much dance from South Africa that I can. This shows the multitude of dance forms in South Africa, and most importantly, the diversity of its people. To organise this material, I attempt to illustrate what Lliane Loots, the Artistic Director of Flatfoot Dance Company, stated at the 2005 Opening Night of Jomba Contemporary Dance Festival in Durban; in South Africa 'we dance when we protest, we dance when we bury the dead, and we dance to celebrate new life'. By highlighting the relationship of the dance forms with the individual, I aim to help students make connections with the people of South Africa on a personal level, and hopefully, limit an othering, or a marginalisation, or a type of orientalisation of South African culture.

Neither, do I ignore the cultural backgrounds of my students as to do so is dangerous;

'...culture must be conceptualized more broadly in order to be responsive to students' identities' (Irizarry, 2007, p. 21). I try and balance the concept of self and other, not only when teaching my students in other modules, but especially when focusing on dance from South Africa in a British university context. This undertaking, of attempting to balance the self and the other, is an extension of an observation by Ninetta Santoro in 'Teaching in Culturally Diverse Contexts: What Knowledge about "Self" and "Others" do Teachers Need?' (2009). In this article in which she studies teacher education, specifically in Australia, Santoro (2009, p. 34) argues 'that knowing the 'ethnic self' and the 'ethnic other' are inextricably connected and are crucial to developing multicultural pedagogies and effective classroom practice.' Therefore, by focusing on the individual and their connection to the dance form, I seek to disrupt the binary of us versus them, or the North versus the South, or the East versus the West, or the First World versus the Third World, or the notions of developed and developing. This type of polarity thinking reinforces stereotypes and homogenises cultural groups and as a result ignores the intricacies at play. Santoro captures this importance of recognising the complex interplay of self and other when she also draws on Homi Bahaba's concept of hybridity (1994). It is in this process of the students identifying what they might share with young people in South Africa, such as a passion for dancing or aspects youth culture, and what they might not, for instance the access to travel that holding a British passport allows, with individuals in South Africa that hopefully does not 'silence debates about the inequalities that do exist *because* of racial and ethnic difference' (Santoro, 2009, p. 38). Santoro (2009, p. 38) stresses how individuals 'can identify with a number of ethnic and cultural groups' and this is the case for many of the British students I teach.

I make use of as much visual material that the students can easily access themselves, as I try to approach any topic from a student's point of view, and by using the tools available to them, such as social media networks and various search engines on the Internet. From this material, we then work together to discover more about the topic. As an example, the students and I have focused on Beyoncé's music video 'Run the World (Girls)' (2011) and her work with Tofu Tofu, a Mozambican isipantsula group. We discuss cultural borrowing of the dance forms kwasa-kwasa and isipantsula, the reinforcement or subversion of African stereotypes, and the appropriation of contemporary African art and cultural practices by dominant cultural praxes such as American popular music. I try very hard not to let my pedagogy be informed by an out-dated notion that the academic is a gatekeeper of a particular research area. In 'The Politics of Personal Pedagogy: Examining Teacher Identities', Doug Risner in his section titled 'The Politics of Gender in Dance Pedagogy' (Kerr-Berry, Clemente & Risner, 2008: 95) highlights the problem of the 'traditional "banking method" in which a student is viewed as an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher's expert deposits of information.' Risner's article draws heavily on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and his notion of the traditional 'banking method', and like Risner, I too am *not* a supporter of this type of pedagogic system. As an academic, I research dance, and therefore am also a student of dance studies, and much like the students I teach, sometimes, I do not know the answer. What I can do is share with the students a variety of research skills, and thereby hopefully help them develop their own set of critical skills in the study of dance. 'Pedagogy needs to be transformative rather than transmissive, and organised so that students are

trusted to be involved in decision-making and jointly steer the direction of the learning (Whitburn & Yemoh, 2012, p. 24).

Risner writes about his own pedagogy, and outlines ‘three significant power shifts that occur’: the ‘Student-Directed Approaches’ where the ‘key [...] is balancing student input and direction with faculty guidance in a dialogical approach’ (Kerr-Berry, Clemente & Risner, 2008, p. 96). The second shift is ‘Learning from Shared Experience, that is that all knowledge is socially constructed. To really know something is to know it in relation to others – others’ perspectives, experiences, thinking contexts, and histories’ (Risner in Kerr-Berry, Clemente & Risner, 2008, p. 96). Many of the students at the British university where I am based have had historically limited access to the diversity of dances practiced on the African continent. Consequently, we start by collaboratively researching the South African dance practises available online via the internet and social networks; for many young adults today, this approach tends to be their first tactic for obtaining information about dance styles. We watch a number of clips on YouTube, and almost as an accident by design, and as a shared experience, this then leads the students and I into a short discussion of the reasons why certain videos have better recorded quality, and what similarities or differences did they notice when looking at this visual material.

We also examine what might the factors or reasons be for some of the comments left on YouTube, and why I might not be a fan of the Disney musical *The Lion King*. This always becomes a heated but most enjoyable discussion, especially because a number of the students have seen the show, and are now being asked to think through issues around stereotyping and orientalism. At an external examiner’s event at another university in the United Kingdom, I had an informal discussion with a dance academic who raised an important point about *The Lion King* musical and I must acknowledge this here. They noted that the British version of the musical offered many black dancers an opportunity to perform in a major production and many in leading roles. The colleague added that *The Lion King* enabled a number of these black dancers to think through notions of identity and community. I understand that this might be the case, nonetheless, I am concerned with the hegemonic representation of African culture in the musical, specifically Disney’s representation of Africa, and the reinforcement and normalisation of an imagined and nostalgic Africa. Disney is guilty of similar acts, such as orientalism with the films of *Mulan* (1998) and historical revisionism in *Pocahontas* (1995).

Finally, Risner writes of ‘Imperfection and Risk Taking’ drawing on bell hooks’ ‘Engaged Pedagogy’ (2006) in which

‘hooks advocates, [that] teachers must take the first risk by showing their lack of knowledge, their incomplete understanding of the worlds, the ways in which they struggle, and most importantly, that asking questions is not only acceptable, but also valid and valuable in allowing students to see teachers as people who are human, vulnerable, and not “always right”’ (Risner in Kerr-Berry, Clemente & Risner, 2008, p. 96).

These power shifts are at the core of my pedagogic practice and ethical stances too, and I argue lead to 'genuine conversation' (Conquergood, 2007, p. 65). As a dance researcher, I use ethnography as one of my research methods, and my pedagogy is heavily influenced by this method too. I often make use of Conquergood's (Conquergood, 2007, p. 61) concept of 'Dialogical Performance' as a teaching strategy especially it is 'a way of finding the moral center [*sic*] as much as it is an indicator that one is ethically grounded' (Conquergood, 2007, p. 67).

After a most enjoyable discussion about *The Lion King*, I introduce the students to a selection of South African choreographers and dance companies. Over the past decade, I have built a small library of DVD materials, and I am extremely thankful to the many choreographers and companies who have contributed material to this collection. It is rather obvious to make the case for students watching as much dance as possible. Yet, it is so important to underline this necessity. The more dances from other countries that the students engage with, not only is their understanding of dance in its multifarious forms developed, but hopefully, this knowledge will broaden their understanding of dance from other countries. For instance, this might limit a reductionist understanding of dance from the African continent. Not only do the students study South African dance in a seminar setting, but over the last few years I have invited a few South African choreographers and companies, who are on tour, to work with the students, such as Vincent Mantsoe and Via Volcano, an isipantsula group. Regrettably, with the ruthless cuts across the United Kingdom and European arts sector, and the current changes taking place in British higher education, the arts have witnessed a massive reduction in support for teaching and research. The opportunity for these workshops and the importance of ensuring that a diverse range of cultural practices are represented in the curriculum, through seminars, workshops, and performances, is at risk. Ultimately, this will add to the ignorance of the diversity of dance from countries outside of the United Kingdom such as South Africa, and thereby reinforcing dangerous and simplistic stereotypes.

In conclusion, I would like to build on a comment by Lliane Loots in her conclusion of her article 'Post-Colonial Visitations: A South African's Dance and Choreographic Journey that Faces Up to the Spectres of "Development" and Globalisation' (2006). In this text, Loots carefully unpacks the power and value systems at play in international dance exchanges, notions of inter-culturalism, globalisation and its market economy, and the danger and outcomes of a somewhat flawed politics of development (Loots, 2006, pp. 89-101). At the end of this personal and enlightening article, Loots writes about how she is 'yet to find solutions to many of the problems' she raises, 'but [an] awareness is a good beginning' (Loots, 2006, p. 99). It is this awareness that I am committed to embedding in my pedagogic practice, and it is this awareness that I hope the British students I teach have after studying dances from South Africa.

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